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NEW PLAN TO HELP SAVE WHOOPING CRANES TO START, UDALL ANNOUNCES

"Considering our present hatchery abilities, the current loss of eggs and young on the nesting grounds, and the loss that takes place before the birds reach maturity, it is our opinion that taking whooping crane eggs from the wild this year is warranted."

Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has developed competence for hatching and rearing cranes during the past six years by working with species of sandhill cranes closely related to the Whooper. Studies have included the development of methods for removing eggs from nests and transporting, incubating, and hatching them under bantam hens or in mechanical incubators. Other studies covered brooding, rearing and all other facets of crane care in captivity.

Under the plan, Canadian Wildlife Service biologists will continue to locate as many pairs of whooping cranes as possible in their remote nesting area near Canada's Great Slave Lake. After eggs have reached the proper stage, a Canadian pilot will fly a team of United States and Canadian biologists to the sites by helicopter. Whoopers normally lay two eggs. This pickup team will remove one egg each from up to six nests, with as little disturbance as possible to the parent birds. Three hours after egg removal, the nests will be resurveyed to see if the adult birds have returned to incubate the remainder. If not, those eggs will also be removed.

The eggs will be flown to Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, where they will be placed in a portable, electrically-operated incubator. When that phase is complete, biologists from the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife will transport the eggs in insulated containers by air to Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Md., home of the Bureau's Endangered Wildlife Research Station. The eggs will be under 24 hour surveillance until hatching is completed.

Secretary Udall said that the plan has the full support and cooperation of the Canadian Wildlife Service, plus eminent ornithologists and aviculturists.